Inktober at Xbox: Celebrating Visually Artistic Games

Community NerdyBirdy Oct 21, 2021

Video games are an inherently visual medium. While all video games must put significant resources towards the writing, music and technical development of the game, the visual graphics, artwork, and design will always remain a critical focal point.

In honor of this month's Inktober, we thought we'd highlight some of the most visually noteworthy and artistic games that we've seen for Xbox in the last few years. From hand-drawn graphics and animations to cinematic worthy performances, we'll celebrate some of the most visually dazzling games on the platform.

- Sable – 2021

One of the most recent additions to Xbox's Game Pass catalog, Sable allows you to solve puzzles and explore new ruins and regions in an intricately built desert world. With a distinct visual style reminiscent of cartoons, Sable's animation favors clean, smooth lines and solid fill colors.

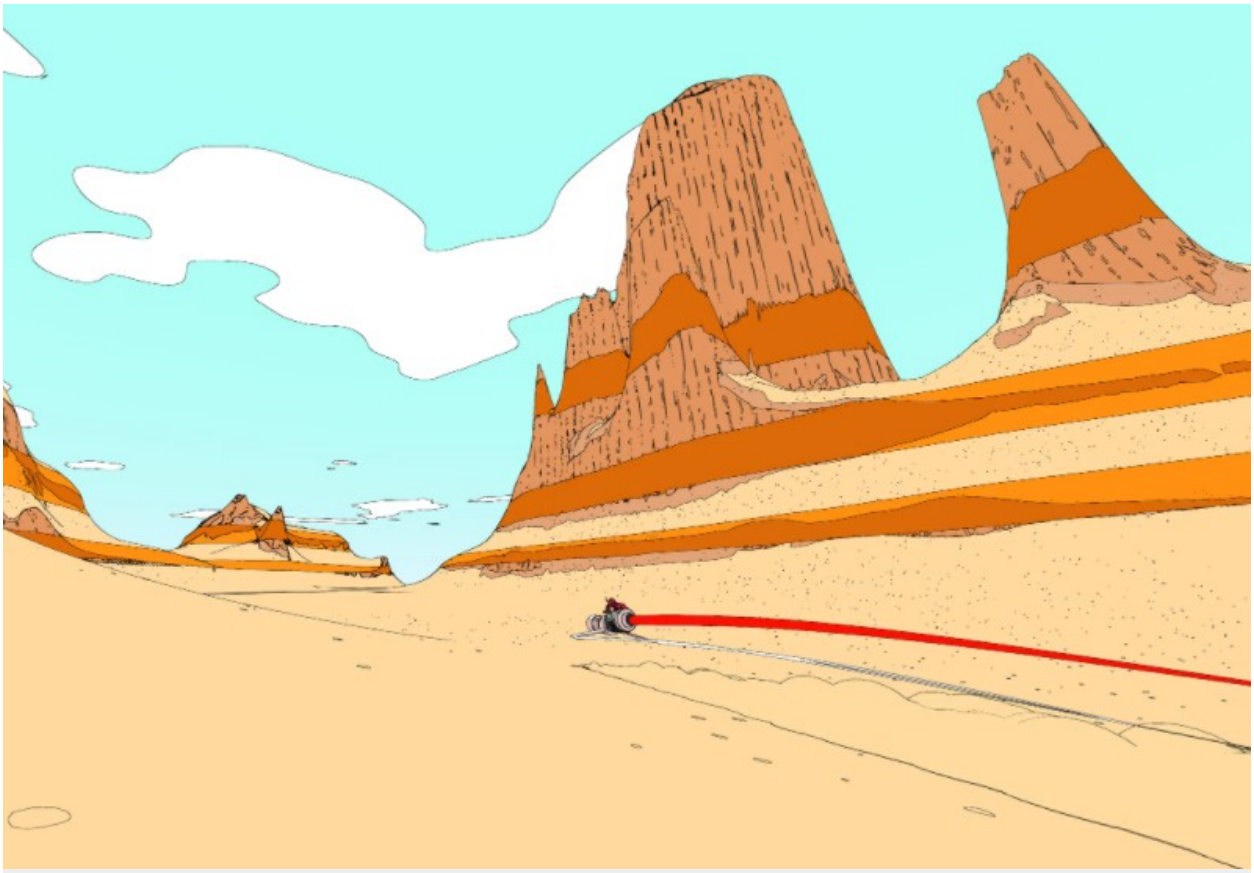

Image: Raw Fury

Sable was released in September 2021 and received immediate critical acclaim. Many critics praised the relaxed gameplay and ambient soundtrack composed by the band *Japanese Breakfast*.

- Firewatch – 2016

Originally released in 2016, Firewatch is praised for its unique visual style as well as its well-written story and characters. The game revolves around a fire lookout near the Shoshone National Forest a year after the Yellowstone Fires of 1988. The game's design and artwork were inspired by the WPA advertisements for National Parks during the 1930's New Deal era.

Image: Panic, Campo Sando

Firewatch’s artwork is central to the game’s plot and storyline, and the developers emphasized getting the visual experience right. As part of the game’s development, the design team camped in Yosemite National Park, visited a lookout tower and studied National Park Service posters from the 1930’s to develop the game’s color palette.

- Astria Ascending – 2021

Developed in the vein of traditional JRPG’s, Astria Ascending combines turn-based combat with 2D side-scrolling and a rich hand-painted artwork style. Each character and landscape is fully hand-drawn and offers a modern take on traditional video game animation styles.

Image: Dear Villagers

Released late in September 2021, Astria Ascending is quickly making marks as one of the most exciting and innovative JRPG’s to come out in recent years.

- Oxenfree – 2016

A supernatural mystery graphic adventure game, Oxenfree broke gaming stereotypes by creating cinematic gameplay without the use of cutscenes. In Oxenfree, the player navigates a secret island and uncovers supernatural events while freely roaming an open-world format.

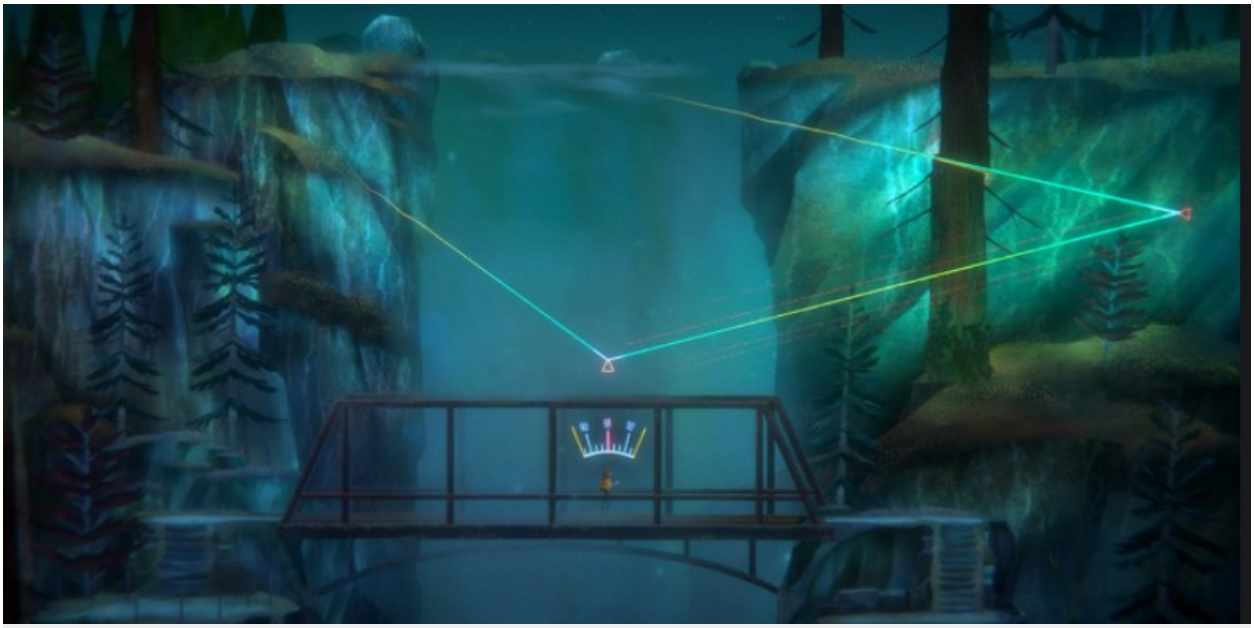

Image: Night School Studio

Oxenfree’s artwork style was also lauded for its use of watercolor inspired graphics and animations. Oxenfree combines bright and geometric images with dark and subdued tones to create a vibrant visual presentation.

- The Artful Escape – 2021

The last game on our list, The Artful Escape, won widespread critical acclaim for its unique storytelling perspective and richly designed artwork and soundtrack. In The Artful Escape, you control a guitar-wielding protagonist who’s trying to forge a rock career out of his folk music family heritage. Your music playing eventually takes you across the galaxy as you befriend space aliens and a unique cast of musical characters.

Image: Beethoven & Dinosaur

Drawing on the cinematic works of Wes Anderson and Steven Spielberg, the game’s designers created a unique visual universe with a wide range of colors, mediums and styles. The Artful Escape was released in September 2021 and has already been named one of the best games of the year.

As you celebrate Inktober this year, we hope that you take time to appreciate the incredible range of artwork that’s shown every year in video games and game development.

What are some of your favorite video game art styles and designs? Let us know in the comments below!